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ABSTRACT

This study, conducted by Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, investigated differences in preservice administrators' perceptions of electronic and paper career advancement portfolios, noting their perceptions of the potential value for career advancement of each type of portfolio. The study occurred during one semester in a leadership preparation program in a Texas university. A group of 14 preservice administrators completed an electronic portfolio, and 25 completed a paper portfolio. Both groups received training in portfolio development. All participants completed a questionnaire about the development of portfolios for use in administrative career advancement. The questionnaire examined: (1) administrator's initial impressions regarding construction of career advancement portfolios prior to training in portfolio development; (2) the extent to which their thoughts differed during the process of portfolio development; (3) the extent to which their perceptions differed regarding their completed portfolios; and (4) the extent to which their beliefs regarding the value of portfolios for career development differed. Results indicated they felt stress at the thought of developing such tools prior to training. The groups differed in their concerns during the development process, with the electronic portfolio group having added stressors about the electronic media. Though both groups reported feelings of accomplishment, confidence, and pleasure upon completion, the electronic portfolio group addressed many issues regarding electronic technology. Most preservice administrators felt the portfolios would be valuable for career advancement, though the electronic group had some concerns. (Contains 7 references.) (SM)

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Running Head: ELECTRONIC CAREER ADVANCEMENT PORTFOLIOS

An Exploratory Study of Perceptions of Preservice Administrators on Traditional versus Electronic Career Advancement Portfolios

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An Exploratory Study of Perceptions of Preservice Administrators on Traditional versus Electronic Career Advancement Portfolios

There is a lack of information regarding the use of portfolios for administrator career advancement. Although much has been written regarding portfolios for teachers and students, little research has been conducted regarding career advancement portfolios related to preservice administrators. A review of literature at the time of this study revealed that only five published reports appeared with regard to career advancement portfolios for administrators (Brown & Irby, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Daresh and Playko, 1995; Guaglinone, 1996). The literature contains no references to electronic career advancement portfolios for administrators.

An administrative portfolio is defined as a collection of thoughtfully selected items or artifacts and accompanying reflections that indicate an individual's experience and ability to lead (Brown & Irby, 1995). Brown and Irby (1995; 1997) and Daresh and Playko (1995) proposed three types of administrative portfolios: 1) professional development portfolio (also described by Guaglinone in 1996), 2) evaluation portfolio, and 3) career advancement portfolio.

Brown and Irby (1995) suggested that the career advancement portfolio is an innovative tool for pursuing leadership positions, seeking promotions, and assessing applicants. Furthermore, the artifacts and accompanying reflections present strengths and accomplishments of the candidate that might not be apparent in the typical résumé, application form, or interview. Daresh and Playko described this type of portfolio as an "administrator portfolio for career planning ... that is directed toward helping an individual land an initial position, make a lateral career move..., or seek a related but very different position in educational administration" (p.8). Alternately, Guaglinone (1996) called this portfolio a "demonstration portfolio... used as a presentation of strengths and administrative skill and accomplishments ... used when one is making a presentation of oneself, such as at a job interview" (p. 233).

Brown and Irby (1991; 1997) and Guaglinone (1996) advocate that the career advancement portfolio should be reflective of the type of position sought and of the qualifications revealed in the job announcement. According to Brown and Irby (1997), the career advancement portfolio should include the following minimum components: 1) résumé, 2) leadership framework, 3) five year administrative goals, and 4) artifacts and reflections representing general leadership experiences, curriculum experiences, interactions with teachers, students, parents and community, presentations, committees, professional growth experiences, and 5) accolades, awards, or letters of support.

In a 1996 study on the effectiveness of career advancement portfolios for women, Brown and Irby found that the development and use of career advancement portfolios effectively addressed the women's lack of self-confidence, lack of sophistication regarding career advancement techniques, and feelings of inadequacy in obtaining and effectively serving in administrative positions (Brown & Irby, 1996a). Further research indicated that portfolios can be an effective career advancement tool for both males and females which can: highlight strengths and accomplishments, serve as reflective and predictive indicators of the leadership potential of the administrative candidate, and provide vital information to potential employers (Brown & Irby, 1996b, 1996c).

While former studies have focused on paper portfolios, the current study was conducted to gain "deeper insights" into the use of electronic portfolios for career advancement by preservice administrators. Specifically, we investigated differences in perceptions between preservice administrators' construction of electronic and paper portfolios, as well as their perceptions of the potential value for career advancement of each type of portfolio.

Method

This study was conducted during one semester in a leadership preparation program in a regional university in Texas. The following research questions were addressed.

1. What were preservice administrators' initial impressions regarding the construction of a career advancement portfolio prior to training in portfolio development?
2. To what extent did the thoughts of the two groups of preservice administrators differ during the process of the development of their portfolios?
3. To what extent did the perceptions of the two groups of preservice administrators differ regarding their completed portfolios?
4. To what extent did the two groups of preservice administrators differ in their beliefs regarding the value of the portfolio for career advancement?

Participants

Participants in this study were 40 preservice administrators enrolled in a mid-management certification program. Fifteen participants were enrolled in an internship course, while 25 were enrolled in a pre-internship leadership course.

Instrument

A questionnaire pertaining to the development of portfolios for use in administrative career advancement was developed. Its content was validated through a review of the questionnaire by two experts in the field of performance assessment.

Data Collection/Procedures

This qualitative study employed a four question, open-ended questionnaire with two groups of preservice administrators in a leadership preparation program. The group (n=15) who was enrolled in a leadership internship course completed the electronic portfolio using the PersonaPlus (Global Corporate Solutions, 1995) multimedia software program. The other group (n=25) completed a paper portfolio and was enrolled in a pre-internship leadership course. Both groups were trained on portfolio development in a three-hour session. The group developing the electronic portfolio had an additional three-hour session on the computer program for development of the portfolio. (It must be noted that the multimedia authoring software, PersonaPlus, was originally developed for

student portfolios and was not modified for administrative portfolios at the initiation of the research study. Therefore, adaptations had to be made by the preservice administrators in the development of their portfolios. Additionally, not all five components of the career advancement portfolio advocated by Brown and Irby were included in the electronic portfolio due to time constraints in teaching the technology and putting the portfolio together electronically.)

Data Analysis

The two principal researchers individually read each response to the questionnaires and compiled a set of outcomes from each of the four questions and the comments section. Each principal researcher used the category system to code questions on all 40 questionnaires. Any mention of an outcome was coded as an instance of a particular category. High inter-rater reliability or consistency was established on the interpreted set of outcomes by each researcher.

Results and Discussion

Results are reported by each research question and addressed through qualitative analysis. Results of the study are suggestive rather than conclusive, but are relevant for further dialogue and study. Although the results are limited in scope, the data indicate that the career advancement portfolio, whether electronic or on paper, is valuable for use by aspiring administrators.

Research Question 1: What were preservice administrators' initial impressions regarding the construction of a career advancement portfolio prior to training in portfolio development?

The overall initial impression of all preservice administrators prior to training in portfolio development was one of overwhelming stress at the thought of developing such a career advancement tool. The interns' representative responses were: "I didn't think that it would be relevant;" "I think this will allow me to gather important information, but it will be time-consuming;" or "This is so confusing." The other group had typical

responses such as: "This is a scrapbook;" "It's overwhelming;" "I am skeptical because administrators in my district don't use portfolios." The concerns emerging from all participants' responses regarding career advancement portfolios prior to training in portfolio development were:

- relevance for securing a job
- worthiness of such a project at it relates to the amount of time involved in completion
- misunderstanding of what a career advancement portfolio is
- skepticism as to how the portfolio would be perceived in the application/interview process.

Research Question 2: To what extent did the thoughts of the two groups of preservice administrators differ during the process of the development of their portfolios?

Five intern respondents reported that during development they had questions such as : "Am I ever going to finish?", "Will this technology WOW someone?", "Will the computer program work?", and "Will this kind of portfolio give me an edge?". In addition, three of the intern respondents had concerns about whether the computer program would work and the interviewer's having time to utilize this tool. Three other interns indicated processing thoughts of possibilities for the electronic portfolio; their words were:

> "In the past with my experiences of interviewing, I have been fortunate to be fairly successful. Getting the interview has been the most difficult part of the process. With being able to present myself visually and orally, I could see the playing field being a little more level in my favor."
>
> "By using the electronic portfolio, the interviewer will have an opportunity to hear me through my recorded voice and see me on the imported video before the meeting."

"The multimedia components will make a person 'alive, real' to a prospective employer. The written text seems so dull in comparison."

Yet, another intern expressed a need to put the electronic portfolio "on the internet and e-mail it to future employees, etc...;" but questioned whether "it will be a secure document if it is placed on the internet." Also, several concerns regarding compatibility of software were expressed.

The other group of preservice administrators expressed a different set of concerns related to choosing and finding the best artifacts to represent their careers. Representative comments included: "Do artifacts really portray who I am as a teacher, person and professional?" "a good feeling of accomplishment," "helped me to critique my career," and "enjoyable and confidence-building experience."

The differing responses from the two groups indicate that the interns were more concerned with the technology aspect of the development of the portfolio, while pre-internship students were more concerned about the contents and relevance of the portfolio to their careers. During the process of completion of the electronic portfolio, most thoughts of the former group centered on:

- time in completion of the electronic portfolio
- technology issues such as:
    - -- software compatibility
    - -- transporting portfolios via internet
    - -- enabling/not enabling an interviewee via the technology
    - -- perfecting the audio/video components
    - -- interviewers' time in their review
    - -- security issues with the internet.

The group of preservice administrators who completed the paper portfolio revealed the following overall issues during their completion of the project:

- concerns with materials to include in the portfolio

- critiques of their careers and accomplishments
- feelings of confidence.

Research Question 3: To what extent did the perceptions of the two groups of preservice administrators differ regarding their completed portfolios?

The interns commented that the portfolio "was a convenient item," "contained important information about me all in one place," "excited me to look at it," and "helped start me on documentation about myself." One intern stated, ".. an electronic portfolio will show that we are 'up' with the current trends." Additionally, one stated upon completion of the project, "When a potential employer has the opportunity to hear you and see you, as opposed to simply seeing words on a piece of paper, that helps to give an edge in the pursuit of that job."

The workshop preservice administrators stated that they were: "proud of accomplishments," "satisfied with the completed portfolio," "better able to identify areas that needed more concentration," "in possession of a good summary of personal skills," "excited about showcasing my own career," "eager to finish other projects to add to portfolios," and "planning to update and continue every six months."

While both groups of preservice administrators reported feelings of accomplishment, confidence, and pleasure at having completed their portfolio, once again the intern group completing the electronic portfolio addressed a variety of issues regarding the technology and the software program.

Research Question 4 : To what extent did the two groups of preservice administrators differ in their beliefs regarding the value of the portfolio for career advancement?

Asked if they felt that the portfolio would be a valuable tool for career advancement, twelve of the interns replied in a positive manner, while the other three felt that the program, combined with the existing software program without modifications, would be too time-consuming and too difficult to complete or to be useful. The twelve interns who responded positively stated that the portfolio: "tells a complete story, more so

than a transcript or résumé," "separates the applicants from one another and could show one's technology skills," "helped me to see my accomplishments as well as areas for additional personal growth," "provides me an opportunity to build my confidence prior to going into the interview -- I know what my strengths and my weaknesses are because I have really thought about it as I developed my portfolio," and "gives employers a view of the applicant prior to the interview."

A negative comment regarding the electronic portfolio included, "I didn't feel that the computer portfolio system was complete, so it hindered the full completion." Also a concern regarding general technology was expressed, "What if you attempted to use your electronic portfolio and it malfunctioned?" Furthermore, one intern brought up an ethical concern, "If video is included in the portfolio, that could be a potential bias in who the employers will bring in for an interview, so I guess it could be good or bad."

The other group of 25 preservice administrators who completed the paper portfolio reported overwhelmingly favorable attitudes toward the value of the career advancement portfolio. Their responses included: "made me conscious of what I have done and my accomplishments," "it will illustrate my leadership skills," "it offers proof of my accomplishments," and "it will show the interviewers that I have taken the time to organize my career accomplishments."

Differences in perceptions of both groups regarding the type of portfolio completed were based mainly on technology issues with the intern group and feelings of expressions of personal leadership accomplishments with the other group. Among the interns, technology seemed to override the leadership affect as expressed in career advancement portfolios; however, even with the technological concern, there was a general positive affect regarding career advancement portfolio development.

Additional Comments:

Additional information was gleaned from a section of the questionnaire that asked for additional comments. Again, the comments of the intern group revealed more

concerns with the technology aspect of the portfolio, as opposed to the other group who was more concerned with the contents and meaning of the portfolio. The interns made comments such as: "way to expand technology," "computer portfolio was difficult," and "still many quirks to work out on computer." The pre-internship group noted that: "reflections are personally valuable," "good idea for self-assessment," "more school districts should require them of administrators," and "we are on the cutting edge." The majority of the students emphasized the need to continue to include the career advancement portfolio in the leadership preparation program, as it was relevant to leadership development and their job-seeking skills.

Conclusions

Although this research is narrow in focus, it reports meaningful interactions of preservice administrators with paper and electronic career advancement portfolios. Overall results of this study imply that: 1) training in career advancement portfolio development is essential, 2) electronic portfolios have added stressors; therefore, a specific user-friendly software program for administrator career advancement portfolios is needed, and 3) career advancement portfolios, paper and electronic, are viewed by preservice administrators as positive and should be included in leadership preparation programs.

Recommendations

It is our hope that this piece of research will serve the purpose of opening dialogue regarding further research designs related to the topic. This is a current topic and one that needs to be discussed with scholars in the field to develop better training models for career advancement portfolios for preservice administrators.

If professors in educational leadership programs are to serve as sponsors of their students, then such a tool may assist them in promoting their students as candidates for administrative positions in schools. Guaglinone (1996) suggested that program portfolios be turned into professional development portfolios; however, our recommendation is to

teach the career advancement portfolio as a separate component in the leadership program.

A concern that has been borne out of this research involves the electronic portfolio. The software utilized in this project needs improvement to be made useful for preservice or practicing school administrators. Additionally, there are ethical and legal questions that must be answered and possibly tried regarding prospective employers and potential ethnic, linguistic, or gender biases as they review the visual electronic portfolios. Other legal and ethical issues concern the publication of this portfolio on the internet and the transmittal of information, as well as the ability of the material transmitted to be altered by someone else.

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